

## **Capitol Corner with Matt Gillard: Legislators Discuss Top Priorities for Children, Youth, Families**

March 10, 2015 – Several important signals have emerged from hearings in recent weeks regarding key Michigan's Children priorities, including the state's child care subsidy system, the Great Start Readiness Program for 4-year-old preschoolers, investments in career tech and adult education, and critical K-12 support for the most challenged kids. Here's a brief recap of developments for the current state budget (through a supplemental budget bill) and legislative committee hearings on next year's budget.

**Child Care:** Important to child care providers and child care consumers was the approval of significant improvements to the Child Development and Care program in the state's supplemental budget bill for the current year. Supported by unspent federal funds from continually declining caseloads were an increase in tiered reimbursements; a continuous 12-month eligibility provision that will improve consistency in care regardless of changing family circumstances such as job loss; and allowing families to maintain their child care assistance even when they begin to earn a little more money. It was noteworthy that lawmakers, many new to the legislature this year, heard a detailed explanation of the program by Michigan Department of Education -- Office of Great Start (MDE-OGS) staff in an appropriations committee. It was a critical primer about an essential program benefiting thousands of low-income families and important for the lawmakers to hear.

**Great Start Readiness Program:** Michigan's top business leaders from the Children's Leadership Council were back before the Legislature during budget hearings with a strong message of support for the state's 4-year-old preschool program and the necessity to focus even earlier, on children 0-3. The early childhood message, carried by those popular with business-friendly lawmakers, was significant. This came after a presentation by the MDE-OGS on the successes of the 4-year-old preschool expansion. In response to the question about expanding preschool to mixed classrooms of 3- and 4-year-olds in rural areas, MDE-OGS was open to such "strategic options," but not if access to preschool for 4-year olds was compromised.

**Career Tech and Adult Education:** A hearing to examine Gov. Rick Snyder's desired investments in career tech produced tough questions about outcomes and effectiveness, though support for the efforts. In addition, the discussion revealed general interest in rethinking the state's support of adult education. We are now working to tie this interest to an appreciation of the critical need to build adult literacy as a strategy to improve children's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency.

**Support for the Most Challenged Learners:** With major differences at play over how lawmakers determine priorities for state education dollars, there has been significant committee discussion about the use of funding targeted toward the most at-risk students. Advocates know that certain categorical programs build equity in our school system, including the At-Risk funding program recommended for significant increase by the Governor, so the result of discussions on how to target funds for particularly challenged districts will have huge implications.

Aside from these scheduled hearings, Michigan's Children has been meeting with legislators one-on-one to further share our priorities and we continue to do so throughout the budget cycle. To keep updated on how the 2015-16 budget is progressing in our priority areas, link back to our [Budget Basics](#).